

Remarks of Senator Patrick Leahy
Senate National Guard Caucus Press Conference
November 16, 2010

[As Prepared for Delivery]

Hello everyone, and welcome back as we announce a ‘changing of the guard’ at the Senate National Guard Caucus.

It’s a pleasure to be here with my friends Senator Kit Bond of Missouri and Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina. In a minute I will turn to Senator Bond, but before I do I want to say a few words about him and about the importance of our Caucus and its work over the last few years.

The Senate National Guard Caucus is one of the most active caucuses in the Senate. We’re proud to be 97 members strong, so when the Guard Caucus speaks, it really is the voice of the Senate on Guard issues.

It has been a great pleasure to work side by side with Kit Bond as a Co-Chair of the National Guard Caucus since 1999, when I took over for Senator Ford of Kentucky, who was retiring from the Senate. Kit and Wendell actually founded the Caucus together in 1989.

In his 21 years as the Republican Co-Chair, Kit has worked successfully with his fellow Co-Chairs to give the Guard its rightful place in the leadership of the Department of Defense.

The Senate Guard Caucus arrived on the scene at a crucial time. In a trend that accelerated after 9/11, the National Guard has gone through major changes in the missions we assign to the Guard, and in its role in our overall defense and homeland security structures. The Guard is a 21st Century military organization that had outgrown the Pentagon’s flowchart for decision making. It was time to clear away the cobwebs and update the Guard’s expanded role in the bigger picture. The Senate National Guard Caucus accepted these challenges, took on this project, and has achieved results.

And one of my fondest memories of working with Kit on Guard issues was in 2008 when we worked with the Armed Services Committee and the members of the Caucus to pass the original National Guard Empowerment Act as part of that year's Defense Authorization Act.

You can see some of the accomplishments of those reforms highlighted on these charts. The bottom line of the Guard Empowerment reforms has been to make sure that the National Guard would no longer be treated like second-class troops when it came to funding, equipment, and other resource and mission decisions.

On the Appropriations Committee, Kit and I have also reinforced those gains each year by making sure the National Guard and the Reserve Equipment Account is fully funded.

Working with Kit as my Co-Chair has been a great pleasure. You would be hard-pressed to find someone in the Senate with a better feel for Guard issues from the state perspective. Before coming to the Senate, Kit was the Governor of Missouri and he brought a first-hand understanding of these issues.

Kit is also a good friend. Although it sometimes seems that congressional rancor rules the day, Kit and I have always enjoyed solidarity on issues related to the Guard and to empowering the Guard.

Our partnership as Co-Chairs has continued to show that bipartisanship is possible -- and productive.

Thanks, Kit. I'm sorry to see you go, but I'm so proud of everything we accomplished together as partners.

As I've often said, the Guard doesn't let America down, and we can't afford to let our Guard down.

With that, I would like to pass the floor to my esteemed Co-Chair of the Senate National Guard Caucus, the senior Senator from Missouri, Senator Bond.

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